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NEW BOOKS REVIEWED.

HISTORY.

IN writing the life of the great Countess of Tuscany* Nora Duff went straight to old books, to published documents and some still unedited, and to first-rate historians, and her facts are probably indisputable, all of them. But the three great questions of the book she simply—as we may say in logic—begged. She writes delightfully, she presents full-length portraits of her leading figures, Matilda, Henry IV and Gregory VII; she recalls the vanished life of the Castle of Canossa and the personality of the faithful secretary, the monk, Domnizo; and she gives an amazingly lucid account of the difficult policies of Italy, especially in the south. No doubt to do this she simplifies her subject, but it is simplicity of a lawful sort that prefers to omit non-essentials rather than to hurry over confused details. She has almost an eighteenth - century quality in her directness of approach; her love of characterizing the main figures and omitting the rest; her preference for personalities over tendencies; her simple, unhurried fluency. The book, which is written for people of culture, not for archivists, cannot have too much praise for its clear method and its easy style. No pleasanter book can be fancied. If no such things existed as truths in religion, politics or history, it would be perfect.

But all that is not matter of fact and dates the author takes most for granted, where it is most in dispute. She presents a view of the intricate situation in Italy and Germany which is wonderfully plain and in a sense complete. But it is incredibly from a single point of view. She simplifies the natures of great figures; she cuts their psychology down and lifts their motives up, just as she simplified events, and with less happy result. Was

* “*Matilda of Tuscany, La Gran Donna d’Italia.*” By Nora Duff. London: Methuen & Co. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co.

Gregory VII really this figure, of apostolic purity no less than apostolic fervor? Was Matilda no more than a dutiful and devout lady rich in her own right? And among all the charming chroniclers cited, out of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the early nineteenth, was there none to suggest that in Hildebrand's policy, his brilliancy and success lay the seeds of decay and destruction? Did she never guess that the scene at Canossa was the close of a first act, to which the last began only thirty years ago with a sentence engraved on the Hartzburg and a wall broken through on the Roman hill? She assumes, in brief, the complete wisdom and righteousness of Hildebrand's policy; the advisability of all he fought for, the impeccability of his motives from our own point of view even. This is history *a parti pris*.

It is not safe to assume so much. The disputed identity of the Countess Matilda with Dante's gentle lady of the earthly Paradise she affirms in two sentences and a foot-note, quoting a handful of names out of that particular tradition in criticism which does beyond question "back" the great Countess. But she offers no other argument, nor yet counter-argument, to the familiar objections which have been raised; and she naïvely implies instead of stating the main point she has to make—viz., that Matilda would be set there precisely to typify the visible church she served to such purpose, and to lead on to the manifestation of the church triumphant. The author is content to say that she "in lawlessness and barbarity stood for law and order." That is it! To the author, as to Gregory nearly a thousand years ago, Rome is order and the northern ideal is barbarity.

So she goes on, with the oddest alternation of twentieth-century standards of culture and eleventh-century standards of government. It would be conspicuously unjust to say she wanted candor or sincerity or was deliberately false to larger judgments of history,—for history does, in the course of a thousand years, declare a kind of right and wrong. From Dante to Lord Acton the Church at Rome counts a long roll of sons who have pronounced those judgments. This biographer has the same direct vision as a child and the same direct utterance in its own sense. She is true and fervent both. Yet no one would learn that the forged Decretals were forged from her. Again, in the matter of the Investitures, she is content to name and dismiss as simony the whole issue. Now any issue so vital to the tenure of kings and

the constitution of empires, as the feudal allegiance of those great secular princes, the bishops and abbots, cannot be dismissed as a mere sin, a species of "graft." So is the celibacy of the clergy treated as mere personal morality. Northern races have always wanted a married priesthood and have usually had it. Gregory could suppress for a few centuries what had been for a thousand years honest matrimony, but Luther was fatally to win it back. Historians have more than once suggested that there would have been no "Reformation" and no need for one had Gregory been indeed the saint our author presents instead of the prelate of whom his intimate supporter and friend, Peter Damian, said, "He ruled me like a holy Satan." The monk, Hildebrand, loved righteousness and hated iniquity, but the Pope Gregory wanted strength, and for the sake of strength, centralization at any and every cost; wanted power, and for the sake of power, money. Modern historians tend to reckon the scene at Canossa as a victory for Henry to say that Gregory's hand was forced there, as later it failed. And he died in exile.

If the Pope gets more than his share of the glory, Matilda's two husbands get scant measure. One would like to hear more of them. Even of Matilda some things are here unsaid. A hard partisan and a hard hitter; one who dealt stern justice, nor shrank from what we reckon cruelty; who took what came her way and what she took held fast; something with a man's power, a man's strength and a woman's persistency, a woman's intensity; so great among the great princes of the empire that her austere pride found its only fitting utterance in the superb formula of her choice, "Matilda, who, if she is anything, is so by the grace of God"—some such figure looms up through the darkness of the deepening centuries. It may be she was a more splendid soul than we have view of here, with more passions and whims, more terrors and lightnings—yet as presented she is a gracious and lovely presence, princely and right womanly.

The librarian of the Laurentian Library is as unpedantic as he is learned. With infinite charm and geniality Signor Biagi* recreates the daily life and mind of his city, half revealed through the shifting mists of half a dozen centuries. The material is al-

* "Men and Manners of Old Florence." By Guido Biagi. Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co., 1909.